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17mg. tar*, 1.1 mg nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method.

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American Gothic

It's vamping hour.

By Susanne Trowbridge; photographs by Beatrice Ruini-Zeigler & Stephen Zeigler; hair and makeup by Raül for Artists Untied

A SKINTIGHT vinyl sailor suit and a long black velvet gown with a lace-up bodice may sound like the sort of outfits one would only dare wear to the Exotic Erotic Halloween Ball. For San Francisco clothing companies So Hip It Hurts and Blackened Angels, however, helping people make a dramatic impression is something to do all year long.

Lana Michelle's darkly elegant designs have made her company, Blackened Angels, a favorite with the Gothic crowd. Five years ago, when Lana was frequenting L.A.'s Goth clubs, she was unable to find suitably spooky clothes at a price she could afford, so she began making them herself. She moved to San Francisco in 1995, and Blackened Angels went from hobby to full-time business.

The current line, which is available through a catalogue and Blackened Angels' Web site, includes a hip-hugging stretch satin Mortuary Madness skirt with a black lace train ($62) and a rich red panne velvet Angelic Dreams dress that plunges in back ($65). There are also several items for men, such as a patent vinyl jacket with a silver zipper adorned with a skull zipper pull ($65).

Lana Michelle hopes to expand her range of fabrics and colors (not surprisingly, most of Blackened Angels' clothing is black), but for now, she's happy to be dressing the Goth crowd. "They're these wonderful, good people who just tend to look a little bit scary, or a little bit evil," she says.

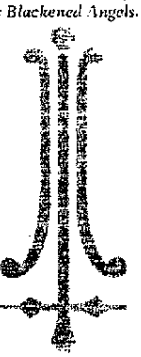
So Hip It Hurts also caters to a slightly out-of-the-mainstream clientele. Its sassy, playful line of latex clothing has a definite fetish appeal, and much of its business is generated by advertising in magazines catering to rubber fans. But partners Kink and Molly emphasize that anyone can look great in latex, and you don't need to be pencil-thin to pull it off. "We deal with a lot of women who are fairly large, and with the latex, you just sort of mold your body into it," Molly says. "We like to create very smooth and rounded lines."

All of So Hip It Hurts' clothing is custom-made, and there's a wide variety of styles, from simple—a basic scoop-neck tank dress is $195—to more elaborate outfits, such as a jaunty red, white, and blue women's sailor suit or a police uniform ($400 and up). The process begins with a one-hour consultation, to make sure the latex garment fits the customer's personality as well as it fits on his or her body; production usually takes four to six weeks.

The designers are working on a small ready-to-wear line that they hope will turn more people into latex lovers. "Why just keep it in the fetish world?" Kink asks. "There's all this sexual energy around rubber. People want to touch you."

To request a Blackened Angels catalogue, call (415) 929-1892 or check out www.blackened-angels.com. So Hip It Hurts Custom Latex Fashions is open by appointment; call (415) 995-9510. ■

Like Goths to flame: *Top, Colleen in latex doublet ($175) and skirt ($195) by So Hip It Hurts. Left, Blackened Angels' Mortuary Madness shirt ($53) and velvet petticoat skirt ($57). Bottom, Angelic Dreams dress ($65) by Blackened Angels.*



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